

By Gary Feuerberg

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The panel heard from **Michael Cromartie, vice-chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)**, an expert on the subject of religious freedom of expression in Vietnam. The **USCIRF** delegation returned from Vietnam in May, making it their fourth visit to Vietnam since 2003. Cromartie, who had traveled to Vietnam in both 2007 and 2009, said at the hearing that it was his opinion, "Human rights and religious freedom conditions have deteriorated over the past two years [in Vietnam]."

"Targeted in particular are the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), independent Hoa Hoa and Cao Dai groups, ethnic minority and unregistered Protestants, Catholics ..., and human rights lawyers who defend vulnerable groups," **said Cromartie.**

"We saw this week that the government of Vietnam perceives even peaceful prayer vigils as challenges to its authority, requiring violence and arrests. As you know 18 Catholics were detained two days ago in Quang Binh Province," **said Cromartie.**